

After knocking Ruth down in the eighth, George came out for the kill in the ninth. A thumping left to the liver and a crushing right to the kidney drove Ruth back into the ropes. But George missed his next punch, and Ruth moved inside, bounced her forehead off his sternum and came up with a vicious right upper cut that lifted George a foot off the canvas before it dropped him on his butt. Ruth, dripping blood from the nose and mouth, her once crisp bouffant sticking out straight from her head like dandelion fuzz, raised her hands over her head. Flash bulbs popped (Ruth, in this pose, appeared on the cover of the next Sports Illustrated). Angelo Dundee kissed Ruth's husband, Ellis. Mills Lane, the referee, started the count. George beat it, but the fight was just clinch and dance from then on, with George so far ahead on points that he couldn't lose it.

#### A BAKER IN A DOUGHNUT SHOP

Ronnie Tagge sat on the concrete step outside the back door of Nguyen's Donut Shop after his shift, drinking coffee and watching the dust devils swirl down the alley, thinking that somehow those tiny twisters — lifting a paper cup here and dashing it against the dumpster, grabbing a yellow newspaper page there and shooting it to the roof — were in some way little manifestations of God, little concentrations of order born from chaos, like galaxies.

And then his thoughts swirled back to Jackie Nguyen, his boss....

He'd been making doughnuts for her since he graduated from high school and, tonight, after two years of platonic wee hours close proximity with that exotically pretty older woman (forty years old if she was a day), Ronnie — with no more reason than a young man's fire and a year-old memory of Jackie clinging to him and soaking the shoulder of his t-shirt with her tears the night her husband died by the deep fryer — weakened, made an impetuous move: 'round about four in the morning, as Jackie dragged the twenty-quart mixing bowl across the floor, Ronnie stepped away from his cinnamon roll yeast dough and gave her protruding butt a gentle, almost apologetic goose.

Jackie popped up straight and turned and glared, and Ronnie took a step backwards and said, "Oh God, Jackie, I'm sorry." The next thing he knew she was heaving his yeast dough off the table. The fleshy blob thumped to the floor and sent up a cloud of flour dust that curled back down off the ceiling, and Jackie grabbed Ronnie by the front of the shirt and pushed him down on the cleared table and mounted and



humped him furiously, fully clothed — two hot frantic minutes that culminated in, for Jackie, a scream and a shudder from down deep in her soul, while Ronnie, stunned but genitally cooperative, lay back to watch the white whirlwinds that had been stirred up by Jackie's whipping, snapping mane of hair.

Ronnie tossed the cold remains of his coffee across the alley and stood up and called through the screen door. "Bye, Jackie. I'll see ya tomorrow." Jackie came to the door and stared through the screen at him and said, "I think maybe you better not come. I get another doughnut maker." Ronnie was silent, looking straight into her clear brown eyes. He nodded and turned and walked away. He showed up for his next shift at the regular time, and Jackie didn't say anything about any new doughnut maker; she just kept herself very busy, and stayed out of arm's reach, bustling wordlessly around the perimeter of the kitchen, leaving vibrations and tiny unseen tornados in her wake.

#### BLUE CORDUROY

The morning view of the ocean from atop the beach bluff of the endless line-up of unbroken waves rolling shoreward had the look of blue corduroy, so perfectly regular was the spacing of the giant breakers.

Ronnie Tagge unstrapped his surfboard from the roof of his car and tripped down the wooden beach-access stairway and padded across the sand and hit the water, slid onto his board and paddled out to the crowd of fellow surfers who were waiting for their perfect wave. He had a tale to tell them, a tale of an unplanned carnal encounter with his boss at the doughnut shop on top of the wooden work table.

The young men sat on their boards, arms crossed, rising and falling in the swells, and listened to Ronnie's somewhat fictionalized (he removed some clothing that had actually remained in place, changed the experience from dry to wet) version of the events. The guys were impressed. They all patronized Nguyen's Donut Shop on their surf safaris up and down the coast route, and they had all checked Jackie Nguyen out, had all flirted unsuccessfully with her.

The guys barked like seals as Ronnie wrapped up his story, and then a comparatively large set of waves rolled through, and the surfers picked their spots and paddled in front of the moving blue mountains and were lifted, as if by God's hand, and then tucked into His pocket as the waves tubed over the reef of submerged riprap boulders that shielded the sewage outfall pipe from His surging power.